

FACT SHEET:

Category:
Life After ABI

Audience:
Person with an ABI

For more information
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ABIOS Neuropsychologist



ABIOS

Acquired Brain Injury Outreach Service

Coping with Fatigue

Introduction

Fatigue or excessive tiredness is a common problem after brain injury. It can be caused by physical activity, cognitive tasks, medication, or just the effort of everyday activities. Fatigue may make other problems worse after brain injury, for example, difficulties with speech, attention and concentration, memory, vision or balance and coordination.



Simple ideas to help you cope:

Plan Ahead

Plan your activities and tasks ahead of time when you can.

- Set time aside to make a daily or weekly plan – be realistic about what you can get done and leave the rest.
- Put your plan somewhere you can see it e.g. on the fridge
- Plan rests between activities and before/after you have a busy period.
- Try to balance easy tasks or activities with harder ones.
- Make a list and check things off when you get them done.

Break Things Down

Make bigger activities smaller by breaking them down into more manageable parts

- Do a small amount at a time e.g. only clean one room rather than the whole house; mow the front yard, not the whole yard.
- Be realistic - choose things you know you can get done – this increases your chance of success, and this gives you energy to keep going.

Timing

Do tasks when you have the greatest energy levels and where you don't have other competing demands on your attention or time.

- Some people have more energy in the morning, or after a rest. Plan your main activities for a time when you feel most rested.
- Ask for help when you need it – this can cut your workload and the time it takes to do things. It is also more fun to do things with other people

Work Smart

Plan when and how you do things so that tasks get done easily and quickly. For example:

- Use lists and weekly planners to plan what you do and when.
- Choose carefully tasks that require greater physical or cognitive energy at times of least fatigue, and plans rests afterwards.
- Avoid driving in peak hour traffic to limit time driving.
- Get other people to do the driving if you are tired, if it is raining or it is dark.
- Consider internet shopping, but if shopping in person, do this at times and on days when it is less busy.
- Avoid noise and crowds
- Use a trolley instead of carrying items.
- Buy prepared food items (pre-chopped veggies, frozen meals) or consider Meals on Wheels as a temporary measure to save time and energy.

Keep Things Simple

- Use internet banking and shopping.
- Get to know your local services and what help they can give you e.g. cleaning, transport, etc
- Have things home-delivered
- Make a list of things to do and then cut it in half or quarters – keep your plans small

Learn to Say No

- Ask yourself if you are doing too much. and don't overload yourself with too many things to do
- Practice saying "maybe" or "I need to think about it".
- Do only the things that are important or essential for you.

Deal with Stress

- Stressful life events can be a cause of fatigue – a sudden injury or disability, changes in employment, living situation or relationships can all cause stress.
- Get support from others, including friends, family and professionals.
- Counselling may be helpful in learning strategies to prevent and manage stress.

Have Fun

- Make sure you are doing things that you enjoy – these things will give you energy.
- Balance less enjoyable activities with more enjoyable ones throughout your day or week.

- Plan something you enjoy at the beginning and end of each day.
- Give yourself a reward once in a while – stop for coffee, go see a movie

Be more Active

- Think about getting more exercise or a fitness program as this will help with your energy levels.
- Inactivity can lead to reduced energy levels and the less you do, the less you may feel like doing.
- Lack of activity can affect your sleep patterns and cause fatigue.
- Talk to a Doctor or Physiotherapist about the kind of exercise you can do before you start.
- Don't overdo things. Take it slowly, especially if you haven't been exercising for a while.

Fatigue and Driving

Driving a motor vehicle or operating heavy equipment may be more risky if you have severe fatigue.

- Get medical clearance from you doctor or neurologist
- Consider an Occupational Therapy driving assessment
- Pace yourself in returning to driving even when you have full medical clearance e.g. drive when you are rested, avoid driving at night, or when tired.
- Reduce any distractions that might overload you or contribute to fatigue e.g. noisy passengers, radio, mobile phone etc.
- Review any medications that might contribute to fatigue or tiredness.
- Review use of alcohol or other substances if you take them, as these may contribute to fatigue.
- If you have epilepsy you will also need clearance from your GP or neurologist, especially if you have ongoing seizures.

Resources

See other Acquired Brain Injury Outreach Service (ABIOS) Information sheets at <http://www.health.qld.gov.au/abios/>

